

REPORTS OF CASES OF INSANITY FROM THE INSANE DEPARTMENT OF THE PHILADELPHIA HOSPITAL.

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*Three Cases of Acute Mania Occurring in the Same Family (Folie
Communiquée).*

Reported by Dr. Harriet Brooke, Assistant Physician.

These three cases have awakened considerable interest in Philadelphia, where they have been discussed in the newspapers. One of the three became depressed in mind and weak physically after child-birth or a miscarriage. A white woman, named Mrs. A—— L——, reputed to be a "medium" and "clairvoyant," was called in to try her powers on this patient. A neighbor told some story about her daughter having been very ill and having been cured by Mrs. L—— "voodooing" her. The medium practised her charms and incantations upon the patient, but instead of restoring her to health, caused her to pass into a condition of violent mania. The patient lived with her mother and a married sister. Mrs. L——, it is said, told the ignorant and credulous women of her miraculous powers, awing and terrifying them, and causing them to believe that an evil spell had been placed upon them. She gave them each a fetich or amulet, and instructed them to repeat certain phrases, such as: "Jack, drive all evil away!" She also administered a tea of some kind. Soon the three women were in a condition of violent acute mania, and all three were sent to the hospital the same day. The "medium" has since been arrested, and sent to prison, in default of bail, on the charge of violating an act prohibiting fortune-telling, etc. It was testified, at one of the hearings, that the medium gave something resembling a piece of wood to the first sick woman; that she produced a small muslin bag that she hung around the first patient's neck by means of a tape; that she told the mother that when the girl raved, she was to say to the bag: "Look up, Jack, be good to Eliza;" also that a battery was brought and electricity was administered to the head of the patient.

The following is a brief history of each of the cases from the records of the hospital :

CASE XVI.—E. M., aged 22 years, colored, married, born in Philadelphia, was admitted to the hospital August 12th, 1887. She has two children, both living and well.

The first symptoms of insanity were manifested three weeks before admission, when she became much depressed mentally. A medium was called in, as already stated, and in about a week she became maniacal and at times noisy and violent.

Examination and inquiry since admission show that she has lost much flesh since the beginning of the attack. Her pulse is weak. Her temperature was taken on the 13th, 14th, and 15th, with the following result :

Aug. 13th, evening (7 o'clock), 100.4° F.

Aug. 14th, morning (11 o'clock), 100°; evening (8 o'clock), 99°.

Aug. 15th, morning (11 o'clock), 101°.

The surface of the body has a tendency to become cool. Usually she is noisy, violent, and destructive; but becomes weak and exhausted, and will remain quiet for a time. She mutters incoherently; but little of what she says can be understood. Apparently she has hallucinations of sight and hearing. Occasionally, words can be caught, showing that her mind is running on the subject of witchcraft and the "white woman," as the medium is called by all the patients. Sometimes she can barely articulate, so great is her weakness and exhaustion.

CASE XVII.—R. D., aged 55 years, colored, widow, born in Delaware, admitted to the hospital August 12th, 1887. She has nine children living (two of them are the other cases of this series). She has been insane twice before at long intervals. She can neither read nor write. She is a devout member of the Baptist Church.

She had shown some peculiarities for several days, but the first active symptoms of insanity were manifested early in the morning of the day before admission. It is said that before the active outbreak, among other things, she went regularly to market and brought home a basket full of provisions which she would burn in the stove. Both of her daughters had evidently suffered from want of food.

On admission, she was exceedingly violent in actions and in manner—raving incoherently, destroying clothing, denuding herself entirely, striking at and struggling with her attendants, shouting and screaming. She constantly mistook the identity of the physicians, attendants, and persons who visited her. She sometimes seemed to imagine that she was conquering the devil by various incantations. Her physical condition was good, much better than that of her daughter (Case XVI.).

Temperature record for three days :

Aug. 13th, evening (7 o'clock), 99.8° F.

Aug. 14th, morning (11 o'clock), 101°; evening (8 o'clock), 99°.

Aug. 15th, morning (11 o'clock), 98.6°

CASE XVIII.—S. D., aged 25 years, colored, married, born in

Philadelphia, was admitted to the hospital August 12th, 1887 (sister of Case XVI., and daughter of Case XVII.). It is stated of her, as of her mother and sister, that she has always been industrious and temperate. She has four living and two dead children.

She first manifested active symptoms of insanity the day before her admission, soon after her mother became maniacal. Her symptoms are and have been much the same as those of her mother. She is violent in speech and action, apparently has hallucinations of sight and hearing, raves and rambles incoherently.

Her mind is less completely clouded than in the case of the other two patients. She can be made with difficulty to talk a little about the "white woman" or "medium." She speaks sometimes of the "Jack" which the "white woman" put around Eliza's neck. She says it looked like a root. Most of the time, however, she talks and raves incoherently about matters that cannot be understood. Her physical condition is comparatively good.

The three patients have been put on conium, and carefully regulated nourishment.